

## **In Memoriam**

### **Donald John Withrington, M.A., Dip.Ed., B.Ed., F.R.Hist.S.**

With the death of Donald Withrington in Aberdeen on Sunday, 1 June 2003, the community of Scottish historians lost one of its leading lights and best loved figures. The Scottish Church History Society mourns his loss, and also feels an abiding sense of gratitude for his many contributions over the years.

Donald Withrington was born in Bethnal Green, London, in 1931 to an English father and Scottish mother. Evacuated from London as a child during the Second World War, he went to live with his grandmother in North Berwick, where he received his schooling. He entered the University of Edinburgh, earning his M.A. with Honours in History in 1953, his Diploma in Education with Distinction (the equivalent of today's First Class Honours) in 1954 and Bachelor degree in Education with Distinction in 1955. Following national service with the R.A.F. and a year of school teaching in Fife, he became in 1958 Lecturer in Education at the University of Edinburgh, specialising in the history and philosophy of education. In 1964, he was appointed Lecturer in History at the University of Aberdeen, which became his home for the remainder of his career. He was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1969 and Reader in 1995, and closed his career as an Honorary Fellow. At Aberdeen, he played a leading role in university life, serving as the Director of the Centre for Scottish Studies (1970-81), Schools Liaison Officer (1976-89), Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (1972-75), long-term member of Senate and in a host of other capacities. He became very much an Aberdeen man, and he loved the University, the city and the surrounding countryside.

As an historian, he was part of the generation which during the 1960s and 1970s brought a fundamental reorientation in the teaching and interpretation of Scottish history, combining thorough archival research with multi-disciplinary approaches and comparisons with other national histories. His own scholarly contributions focused mainly on Scottish religion, education and culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

He produced a large body of important articles and contributed book chapters which explored such themes as non-church-going in the nineteenth century, the myths and realities of the democratic intellect in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Scottish education, the Disruption of 1843, religion in the Highlands, and Scottish intellectual culture in the nineteenth century. A number of his most important articles appeared in the *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* and brought added lustre to our journal. He also served as general editor of a new edition of the twenty-volume *Statistical Account of Scotland, 1791-99*, which including writing the introductions for a number of the volumes and the general introduction to the whole collection.

In addition to his own work, Don Withrington was concerned to facilitate the scholarship of others. For him, historical scholarship was a co-operative effort, and he promoted this co-operative spirit through editorships and leadership in learned societies. Magnanimous and cultivated, he believed that the purpose of the liberal arts and sciences was to enrich the human condition and help each individual to achieve his or her full human potential. He served as secretary-treasurer of the Company of Scottish History from 1966 to 1972, joint editor of the *Scottish Historical Review* from 1972 to 1981, editor and business manager of *Northern Scotland* from 1972 to 1980. He served on the Councils of numerous learned societies. He was always extremely generous with his time, willing to assist when called upon—whether to present a conference paper, examine a doctoral thesis, referee a submission to an academic journal or meet with a visiting scholar. He was a well-loved teacher of history and supervisor of postgraduate research. He was also especially encouraging to younger scholars at the beginning of their careers. His numerous commitments could often make it difficult for him to meet deadlines, but the finished product was always worth the wait.

He greatly valued the Scottish Church History Society, as a forum that kept the study of religion central to Scottish history and united members from the universities, the churches and the interested public in a shared commitment to historical scholarship. He served as President of the Society from 1974 to 1977, and served for many years on the Council and Editorial Board. Until the onset of his final illness, he would scarcely ever miss an

ordinary meeting of the Society, enlivening our proceedings with his pertinent questions and warm sense of humour. He contributed a number of papers over the years, and his guidance improved the papers of others. His presence enriched the life of the Society.

To his wife Nancy and their three daughters, Alison, Gillian and Elaine, we extend our gratitude and our heart-felt sympathy.

S. J. BROWN

